Dr *WILLIAMS*'s THIRD SERMON AT Mr. BOYLE's Lecture, 1695.

IMPRIMATUR,

March 6. 169⅔.

Guil. Lancaſter.

The Characters of Divine Revelation.

A

SERMON

Preached at

St. *Martins in the Fields*, March 4. 169⅘.

BEING THE

Third of the LECTURE

For the Enſuing YEAR,

Founded by the Honourable

ROBERT BOYLE, Eſquire.

By *JOHN WILLIAMS*, D. D.
Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majeſty.

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Heb. I. 1, 2.

God who at ſundry times, and in divers manners ſpake in time paſt unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in theſe laſt days ſpoken unto us by his Son.

IN theſe Words there is, (as I have ſhewed)

I. A Deſcription given of Revelation, 'tis God's *ſpeaking*, or declaring his Will to Mankind.

II. The Certainty of it; 'tis by way of Declaration, *God who at ſundry times, and in divers manners ſpake*, &c. 'Tis taken for granted, and that it needs no Proof.

III. The Order obſerved in delivering this Revelation; it was *at ſundry times, and in divers manners*; *in time paſt by the Prophets*, and *in the laſt days by his Son.*

IV. The Perfection and Concluſion of all; 'tis *in the laſt days by his Son.*

Under the First I have shewed,

1. What is meant by Revelation, in contradistinction to Natural Light.

2. The Possibility of it.

3. The Expedience, Usefulness, and Necessity of it.

Under the Second I have shewed,

1. The Certainty of it; or that there has been such a Revelation.

2. I shall now proceed to shew the Difference between Pretended and True Revelation; or what are the Characters by which we may know Revelation to be True.

In treating upon which, I shall premise,

1. That the proper Subject-matter of Revelation, called here *God's speaking*, being not self-evident, and out of the Road of Nature, requires some extraneous Principles to prove it by. Sensible Objects lye open to the Sense, and need no Proof; for who ever thought it necessary to labour in proving there is a Sun in the Heavens; that it rises and sets, and has its stated Times and Periods of Revolution; which every man that has his Eye-sight knows and sees as well as himself?

And

And there are Rational Inferences which we make from precedent *Poſtulata*, that are as evident as the Principles from which they are deduced, and which all men alike agree in.

But in matters of mere Revelation, there is no manner of Connection between them and what we know before, and are therefore never to be wrought out, or learned by the Book of Nature or Reaſon; but are only to be underſtood and known, as God is pleaſed to communicate them. We might ſearch and ſearch eternally, and yet never have found out the Myſtery of our Redemption; that Myſtery which not only the Prophets *enquired and ſearched diligently*, 1 Pet. 1. 10. but alſo *the angels deſire to look or pry into*, ver. 12. παρακύψαι; and were obliged to wait till *the manifold wiſdom of God* was in its proper time *made known to them by the Church*, Eph. 3. 10. (as has been before ſuggeſted).

This then being the Subject of Revelation, 'tis reaſonable that this Revelation ſhould have ſome other ways of Proof; that what is thus Divine in its Diſcovery, ſhould have a ſuitable Evidence to juſtify it.

2. The Matter of Revelation being thus of Divine Inſpiration and Authority, muſt alſo be worthy of God, and of great Importance, and con-

conſequently requires a Proof ſuitable to the Nature and Importance of it.

If the Matter in debate be inconſiderable, we are contented with probable Arguments, nor are we much concerned which way it is determined: As 'tis indifferent whether the Sun or the Earth be the Centre, as long as we receive the benefit of both: Or whether our Diet nouriſhes, or Phyſick operates by Qualities, or the Texture of its parts, as long as we find the happy Effects of it: Let Philoſophers and Naturaliſts write Volumes, and wrangle eternally about theſe diſputable Points, I find not my ſelf concerned, as long as my Intereſt is not affected nor concerned in the Quarrel. But when the matter is of no leſs conſequence than my Eternal Happineſs, it requires the moſt ſerious Thoughts and Attention to be ſatisfied which is the right, and which the wrong; whether there be a Revelation, or which is the true, and which the falſe; eſpecially ſince there are different Pretenders to it.

3. Revelation being the Declaration of God's Will to Mankind, as he doth not require us to believe without ſufficient Evidence, ſo it doth ſuppoſe that there is ſuch Evidence, and that there are ſome Marks or Signs by which the Truth and Certainty of ſuch Revelation may be known and

and proved. For otherwiſe every Pretender to Revelation would challenge our belief; and we ſhould not know but that the True Revelation might be the Falſe, and the Falſe the True.

4. There are ſome things ſo neceſſary and inſeparably belonging to Revelation, that the want of them will utterly overthrow the Veracity and Authority of it, and yet without further Evidence they are not ſufficient to prove it: Of this kind are Self-agreement, a Conſonancy to the Principles of Nature, and to the true and certain Notions of Mankind concerning Good and Evil. We are certain if a Revelation fails in any one or more of theſe, that it is falſe, and not of Divine Inſpiration: For the Light of Nature, and a true and right Notion of things, are from God; and to ſuppoſe a Revelation to be oppoſite to theſe, is to make God contradict himſelf. Thus if we underſtand any thing, we know God to be infinitely Good and Holy, worthy of the profoundeſt and moſt ſolemn Adoration, becauſe of the Perfections of his Nature, and his Good Will and Beneficence to Mankind. And therefore to ſacrifice Men and Children, and to mingle the moſt Impure and Ludicrous Practices with the Worſhip paid to him, is rather an Offering to be preſented to the moſt Beaſtly and Savage *Dæmons*,

than the Holy and Merciful Creator of all things; and conſequently cannot be of his Inſtitution. In this caſe a Contradiction in the Nature of things, would be like a Contradiction in Terms, or a Contradiction in the Revelation it ſelf. And therefore a Revelation that ſhall evidently contradict them, is a Revelation in Pretence only, it is not Divine.

But tho theſe are thus neceſſary to Revelation, that the want of them is ſufficient to detect what is falſe; yet however it will not follow, That whereever theſe are [that becauſe a Sum of Doctrine agrees with it ſelf, is conſonant to the Light of Nature, and the right notion we have of things] that it is therefore of Divine Revelation. For tho it is ſeldom but the Impoſture fails in one or more of theſe, yet it may have all theſe Characters, and be a Doctrine of Men, of human Contrivance and Compoſure.

And therefore there is ſomewhat farther requiſite to the Proof of a Revelation, ſomewhat peculiar to it, and that ſo belongs to it, as not to be common to any thing with it.

And that is a Point I ſhall now take into Conſideration. Toward the clearer Proof of which I ſhall diſtribute it after a Threefold manner.

1. I ſhall conſider the caſe of ſuch as were them-

themſelves inſpired, and to whom the Revelation was made, and how they could be ſatisfied of the Truth of ſuch a Revelation.

2. The caſe of thoſe that received the matter revealed immediately from the Perſons inſpired, and how they were to judge of the Truthof ſuch a Revelation.

3. The caſe of thoſe that lived in Ages remote from that of the Inſpired Perſons, and after that the Revelation was compleated, (as was the caſe of the *Jews* more eſpecially that lived between the time of *Malachi*, and *John* the Baptiſt; and as the caſe is of all Chriſtians ſince the Apoſtolical times) and what Satisfaction and Evidence may there be expected in thoſe Circumſtances.

1. The Caſe of thoſe that received the Revelation; and how they themſelves could be ſatisfied about the Certainty of ſuch a Revelation.

The Reſolution of this Point belongs in part to the Third General, under which the Difference remains to be ſhewed between a Revelation and Imagination. But I ſhall not wholly refer it thither.

There ſeems to be ſo near an Affinity between Revelation and Imagination; and Imagination is ſo far operative in many Branches of Inſpiration, that 'tis very difficult to ſet out the bounds exactly, and to ſay, This is of Divine Inſpiration, and this the effect of Fancy.

But whatever it may ſeem to us that have no Senſation or Experience of ſuch Divine Repreſentations as the Prophets had; and ſo 'tis no more poſſible for us to deſcribe it, than 'tis for one that never had his Sight, to conceive what Light and Colour is: Yet as the blind man may be convinced that there are ſuch things as Light, Colour, Figure, and Sight, by what he hears and obſerves from thoſe that are about him, and that he converſes with: So we may be as well aſſured that there was in Prophetical Schemes that powerful Repreſentation on the part of the Divine Agent, and that clearneſs of Perception on the part of the Perſon Inſpired, as would abundantly make good thoſe Phraſes of *Viſion* and *Speaking*, by which it is deſcribed in Scripture; and which may well be ſuppoſed as much more to advantage, as the Power that operated upon them was beyond that of mere Imagination. So that thoſe Inſpired Perſons after ſuch Illumination, might as well queſtion what they heard or ſaw by the Natural Organs of Senſe, as doubt of what was revealed to them by the Impreſſions made upon them through the Agency of the Divine Spirit.

To deny this, is to deny that God can ſo communicate himſelf to an Intelligent Creature, that

that the Creature ſhall certainly know that it proceeds from his immediate Suggeſtion; which I have before ſhewed it is unreaſonable to queſtion: And indeed what is no more to be queſtioned or denied becauſe we our ſelves have no experience of it, than the Blind from their Birth can reaſonably queſtion or deny there is what we call Light and Colour; or the Deaf, that there are Sounds, Voices, and Words, becauſe they have no Notion or Idea of theſe things. Now if we think it reaſonable that the Deaf and the Blind ſhould notwithſtanding a Natural Inaptitude and Incapacity in themſelves, aſſent to what all Mankind beſides do unanimouſly aver, and not call in queſtion the Truth or Poſſibility of what is thus affirmed, becauſe of their want of Senſation: So it is not fit or reaſonable to think this way of Revelation never was, and cannot be, becauſe we have not an experimental knowledge of ſuch a Manifeſtation.

For Almighty God can ſo clarify the Underſtanding by a Beam of Light let in from above, as ſhall be as evident a Proof of its Divine Original, as it is that the Light proceeds from the Sun the Fountain of it; or as a Perſon himſelf is ſure of the Truth of any Propoſition, which by an Argument before unthought of, or unconſider'd,

der'd, he comes to be fully convinced of, in ſpight of all former Prejudices and Opinions.

So little Truth or Reaſon is there in a bold Aſſertion of a certain Author, That *Revelation is uncertain, and never certain without a ſign*: And therefore, ſaith he, *Abraham*, *Moſes*, and *Gideon*, asked a Sign, over and above Revelation.

Theol. Polit. c. 2.

But it is far from being true, that thoſe perſons therefore deſired a Sign, becauſe they conceived the Revelation to be uncertain, or that they doubted of the truth of it; but as a Sign was for the greater confirmation of their Faith, in ſome Points difficult to be believed, or in ſome very difficult Services, (for Faith, as other Graces, is capable of Addition and Improvement). In which caſes their asking a Sign is no more an evidence of their diſtruſt of God, or a doubting of the Truth and Certainty of the Revelation, than God's confirming his Promiſe by an Oath, was an evidence that he thought not his Word ſufficient without it; or than *Abraham* could be ſuppoſed not obliged to believe upon a Promiſe alone, without that ſuperabundant confirmation of an Oath, *Heb.* 6. 17.

Thus it was even in the caſe of that Holy Patriarch, to which this Author refers; where before ever he asked a Sign, he is ſaid to have ſo believed

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in the Lord, that it was *counted to him for righteouſneſs*, Gen. 15. 6, 8. his Faith was highly commended, and he is for that reaſon called *the father of the faithful*.

So that Revelation may be certain when there is no Sign; and the perſon was bound to believe it, and was obliged by it, as well where there was no Sign, as where there was.

I grant when the Revelation comes at ſecond hand to a perſon, and reſts on Human Teſtimony, on the Ability and Sincerity of the Relater, or perſon ſuppoſed to be inſpired, there needs ſome farther Evidence, ſome Sign or Signs, that are to be, as it were, the Credentials from Heaven; ſince *all men are liars*, Pſal. 116. 11. that is, may be deceived, or may deceive; may either be ſo weak as to be impoſed upon by their own Imagination, or the Impoſture and Practices of Evil Spirits; or be ſo wicked, as under the pretence of Revelation and Inſpiration, to impoſe upon others. In ſuch a caſe, no man's Affirmation or Pretence is ordinarily to be heeded, further than as he is able to produce ſuch Teſtimonies as are really as Divine as he would have his Revelation accounted to be.

But when a perſon is himſelf the Recipient to whom the Revelation is imparted, there is no

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abſolute need of a Sign or further Evidence to aſcertain the Truth of it to him; when if God ſo pleaſes, the Revelation of it ſelf might be made as clear as it could be made by the Sign. What need is there of a ſign to prove that it is Day, when by the Light of it we ſee every thing about us? Or to juſtify the Truth of a ſelf-evident Propoſition? Theſe are things in their own nature that need no proof. And when a Revelation has an Evidence of its own, as Truth has, it needs no other Light to diſcover it, no further Sign to prove it, for its own ſake, and as to the Perſon to whom the Revelation is made. A Sign therefore makes no alteration in the Evidence; for whether with a Sign, or without a Sign, the Revelation is to be believed; for elſe they that had a Revelation without a Sign, were not obliged to believe, and the Revelation without the Sign had in effect been no Revelation; ſince no one is obliged to believe, where there is no reaſon for it; and there is no reaſon for it, where there is no Evidence, or that Evidence not ſufficient.

So that if it be asked, how a perſon ſhall himſelf be ſatisfied concerning the Certainty of a Revelation made to him, it will receive the ſame anſwer with that, How he ſhall be ſatisfied

ſied concerning the Truth of a Propoſition, or a ſelf-evident Propoſition; for the further Proof of which God may work a Miracle, and give a Sign, but the thing is the Proof of it ſelf.

But however, ſuppoſe a perſon never ſo well ſatisfied in what he calls Revelation, and that in his own opinion he is as ſure of it as of his own Being and Exiſtence; yet what is this to others, that are concerned in that Revelation, if it be true, and as much bound to believe it, and be directed by it, as if they themſelves had been in the place of that Inſpired Perſon, and received it as he did, immediately from God?

This brings us to the Second Caſe.

2. The Caſe of thoſe that did not themſelves receive that Revelation immediately from God, but from the Perſon or Perſons Inſpired: And then the Queſtion is, How theſe are to judge of the Truth of that Revelation?

A Revelation to another, how evidently and convincingly ſoever it may be repreſented to him, is nothing to me, unleſs I am fully aſſured that he has had ſuch a Revelation: But that I cannot be aſſured of, unleſs it be by the like immediate Revelation, or by ſufficient and uncontroulable Teſtimony. But it would be an unreaſonable

reaſonable motion to demand that we be alike inſpired, and have the ſame Revelation to confirm his Revelation; for that would be as if one that was born blind ſhould obſtinately refuſe to believe there is a Sun in the Firmament, or Day, or Sight, unleſs he has the ſame Viſive Faculty with thoſe that do affirm it. It might then as reaſonably be required with *Thomas*, that we ſee the Print of the Nails, and put our hand into the Side, and have all actually brought home to our Senſes, or elſe we will remain Infidels, and not believe. This would be to drive all Faith out of the world, and ſo it would be unpracticable.

We muſt then take the Caſe for granted, and that it is as reaſonable for us to believe, where there are ſufficient Motives of Credibility, as if we were alike actually inſpired as they to whom the Revelation was immediately conveyed.

And here let us place our ſelves in thoſe circumſtances, as if we were to judge of the Truth or Falſhood of a Revelation; and conſider what we our ſelves would in reaſon deſire for our own ſatisfaction, when the Perſons to whom this Revelation is made, ſtand ready to give it. And if I miſtake not in judging for others by what I my ſelf would deſire, it may be reſolved, 1. Into

1. Into the Veracity, Sincerity, and Credibility of the Perſons pretending to Inſpiration.
2. Into the Matter or Subject of Revelation.
3. Into the Teſtimony produced for it.

1. The Credibility of the Perſon; by which we underſtand his Probity and Sincerity; his Capacity, Prudence, and Underſtanding, which render him worthy of Credit, and are meet and neceſſary Qualifications for a Divine Miſſionary. The being a Prophet to others, (as thoſe are to whom a Revelation is made, and that are inſpired by Almighty God) ſo as to teach and direct them in the ſtead, as it were, of God, whoſe Mouth and Repreſentatives they are unto the People, is an Office of great Dignity, and requires ſomewhat of the Divine Image as well as Authority, to recommend them and their Meſſage to others; and therefore Prophets and Holy Men are in Scripture frequently put together, 2 *Pet.* 1. 21. *Matth.* 13. 17. implying that none were fit to be employed in ſo ſacred an Office, that were not Perſons of known Probity, and approved Integrity. I grant in the ordinary Caſes, as there were Prophets bred up in the Schools or Nurſeries of Learning and Morality, there might be ſuch Perſons as were employed

without a ſtrict regard had to theſe qualifications, as Meſſengers that carried an Errand by the order of their Superiour; as 2 *Kings* 9. 1. I grant again, that God might and did ſometimes upon ſome occaſions, inſpire ſuch Perſons as had none of theſe Qualifications to recommend them; as he did *Balaam*: But then this was no more than when God opened the Mouth of the Aſs, to *rebuke the Madneſs of that Prophet*; and who was ſo over-ruled by the Divine Power, as againſt his will to bleſs thoſe whom he came to curſe; which was ſo much the more conſiderable, as it was the Teſtimony of an Enemy.

But as Revelation is a Divine Communication, and a Mark of Divine Favour, ſo it doth ſuppoſe in the nature of it, that the Perſon ſo dignified is duly qualified for it; and which is ſo requiſite in the opinion of mankind, that without it he would rather be accounted an Impoſtor, than a Meſſenger from God, and ordinarily have no more Reverence paid to his Errand than to his Perſon.

And what has been thus ſaid in general, as to the Morality and Virtue of Perſons inſpired, will hold in ſome degree as to their Prudence and Underſtanding, which is ſo neceſſary a Qualification, that the Divine Election of Perſons for ſo peculiar a Sevice, doth in that way either find or make them fit.

It

It is no wonder that a late Author maintains Revelation to be uncertain, when he ſaith that the Prophets were not endued with a more perfect Underſtanding than others, but only with a more Vivid Power of Imagination; and that the Wiſeſt of Men, ſuch as *Solomon*, and *Heman*, &c. were not Prophets, but contrariwiſe Ruſticks, and untaught Perſons, and even deſpicable Women, ſuch as *Hagar*. *Theol. Polit. c. 2.*

For if theſe and ſuch as theſe were the only Perſons employed in the Meſſages of Heaven to Mankind, and whom all the Revelation center'd in, there would be no improbable grounds of ſuſpicion that they were miſled into ſuch an Opinion, by the Faſcination of a working Imagination, and ſo it would be Fancy, and not Revelation.

But what thinks he of *Moſes*, a Perſon acquainted with all the Learning of the *Egyptians*, and richly accompliſhed with all Endowments requiſite to compleat a Governor of a Numerous People, and to conſolidate them into a ſettled Conſtitution; and therefore has the Preference given him to all the moſt Famous and Ancient Lawgivers, by *Plato*, *Pythagoras*, *Diodorus Siculus*, &c.? What thinks he of *Joſhua*, that was bred up under the beſt Inſtructor, and that knew

knew the Art of Government and Conduct in Peace and War? What of *Samuel*, that from his Youth, and even Childhood indeed, commenced a Prophet, and was also the Judge of the whole Nation in unsettled and perilous times, *Acts* 3. 24. 13. 20.? What of *David*, justly called a Prophet, *Acts* 2. 30. and whose Writings shew him to excel in all manner of Poetry and sublime Compositures? What, lastly, of *Solomon* himself, to whom, it's said, the Lord appeared twice, 1 *Kings* 11. 9. in a more eminent manner; and at other times, 1 *Kings* 3. 5. 6. 12. 9. 2. 11. 11.? And if at other times God (who is not confin'd in his Choice or Operations to the Capacity of Instruments) was pleased to reveal himself to, and employ such Rusticks and Illiterate Persons as *Amos*, and afterward the Apostles, he gave them *a mouth and wisdom*, Luke 21. 15. and endued them with such extraordinary Gifts of Elocution and Magnanimity, as made them fit to appear before Kings, and to confront the Wisest of Philosophers, so as that of the Apostle was abundantly verified in them, 1 Cor. 1. 25, *&c.* That *the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men*, &c.

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But it is not only requiſite that the Perſons to whom the Revelation is made, and that are employ'd in delivering that Revelation to others, be Wiſe and Cautious, ſuch as are capable of diſcerning, and not apt to be impoſed upon; but it is as requiſite that they be Faithful and Sincere, and that will not impoſe upon others. For otherwiſe the more knowing they are, the more able are they by plauſible Inſinuations and Pretences to deceive. And what greater Evidence of this can be deſired, than when the Perſons Inſpired live by the beſt Rules, as well as give them? What greater Evidence, than when for the ſake of publiſhing, propagating, and confirming the Truth of what they teach, they deny themſelves of all the Pleaſures, Profits, and Honours of this preſent life; when though they knew before-hand, that *bonds and tribulation abide them, yet none of theſe things move them, neither count they their lives dear unto them*; but with admirable Patience, Reſolution, and Conſtancy, expoſe themſelves to the utmoſt Severities, for the hope of ſuch Reward as they propoſe for their own and the Encouragement of others? What greater Teſtimonies can be given of their Sincerity, and if not of the Truth, yet of their own Belief of it? Who could with ſuch Chearfulneſs

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invite the greateſt Dangers, and with ſuch a brave Magnanimity deſpiſe all the Threatnings of the moſt Potent Adverſaries, and run the Gantelope, as it were, through the moſt formidable Perſecutions, without the leaſt Demur or Hæſitation, if they themſelves were not abundantly and fully convinced of the Truth, Excellency, and Neceſſity of that Doctrine they were thus commiſſion'd to teach? If theſe are not ſincere, there is no Sincerity in the world.

So that as far as the Credibility of the Perſons is a Proof of a Revelation; and ſo far as the Wiſdom, Probity, and Sincerity of Perſons, are a Proof of their Credibility; we have an Evidence to reſt upon, and a Character to try the Truth of a Revelation by.

The 2*d*. Proof in this Caſe, deſirable and neceſſary toward a Satisfaction, is the Subject-matter of it; I mean that which runs as it were a Vein through the whole Body of Revelation. There are ſome Revelations which concern particular Perſons or Families, as that of the Angel to *Hagar*, concerning *Iſhmael* and his Poſterity, which neither made her a Prophet, nor were ſtrictly of Concernment to the reſt of the world. But when we enquire after the Matter of Revelation,

lation, it is principally the main Subject of it, ſuch as the Law of *Moſes* in the Old Teſtament, and the Goſpel in the New.

And here it may be reaſonably expected, that the Revelation ſhould be worthy of God, as it is a Revelation from him; and what ſhould be for the Advantage, Satisfaction, and Happineſs of Mankind, as it is a Revelation to them.

It is to be worthy of God, and what would become him to ſpeak, dictate, and do, if he were himſelf to ſpeak, dictate, and act. In all Relations and Deſcriptions there is a certain Decorum to be obſerved, with reſpect to the Nature, Condition, and Circumſtances of the Things related and deſcribed, which makes up what is called Symetry and Proportion. But above all a due regard is to be had hereunto, in the Ideas and Notions we entertain, or the Repreſentations we make of God, that they may be agreeable to the Dignity and Perfections of his Nature. And if in all our Conceptions of the Divine Being ſuch a ſcrupulous Care is to be taken, that we judge not amiſs of his Nature, Will, and Operations; we cannot but ſuppoſe that in the Revelation of himſelf to Mankind, he who beſt and only knows himſelf, will give ſuch a Repreſentation of thoſe, as is ſuitable to his Majeſty and Autho-

rity; and may ingenerate in the minds of men ſuch an Awe, Reverence, and Regard, as is due from Finite, Created, and Imperfect Beings, to him that is Infinite, Uncreated, and in all Points abſolutely Perfect. There we may well expect to find the moſt lively Characters of the Divine Perfections, as far as we are capable of conceiving; where Juſtice and Power are ſet forth in all their Authority, and yet ſo temper'd with his Mercy and Kindneſs, as ſhall as well raiſe and quicken the Hopes, attract the Love, and eſtabliſh the Comfort of Good Men, as adminiſter matter of juſt Terror to the Wicked. There we may ſuppoſe the Myſteries of the Divine Counſels unlocked, and the Beauties and Harmony of the Divine Providence illuſtrated and deſcribed, as far as God's Government of the World, and the condition of Mankind in it will permit. There we may expect to find the beſt Principles, Rules, and Precepts, to inform and direct us in what we are to know and do; the beſt Arguments and Motives for our Encouragement, and the beſt Means for the purifying and the perfecting of our Natures, and the making us as happy as we are capable; and which ſhall as much exceed what we find in the Moraliſts, as Revelation is above Nature, and the Dictates of Almighty

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ty God are beyond the Preſcripts of Human Wiſdom. Such, in fine, as will lead us to God, make us like to him, and fit us for the enjoyment of him. So that as much as Virtue makes for the Good, Perfection, and Happineſs of Men, ſo much ſhould Revelation make for the Practice of Virtue by its Principles and Rules, its Precepts and its Arguments.

Laſtly, There we may expect to be ſatisfied about the chief Subjects of Human Enquiry, of what Mankind would not only deſire, but what is beſt and moſt neceſſary for them to know. And what is there more material, and of greater Importance, than to be ſatisfied about the Origine of all things, and how they came at firſt to be? What more deſirable, than ſince God is infinitely good, and conſequently could produce nothing that is in it ſelf evil, than to know how the Nature of Mankind came to be corrupted; and that where there is ſuch a clear ſenſe of the difference between good and evil, ſuch Convictions following that Senſe, ſuch Memento's, and ſuch Preſignifications, ſuch Reflections upon it, that there ſhould be ſuch a Potent Sway, Bent and Propenſion to Evil, that with all their Care it can never be prevented, or totally exterminated?

What more desirable, than to know what Nature and Reason of it self is insufficient for [when we can get no further than a *Video meliora proboque*, &c. in the Apostle's Language, *The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do*] may be otherwise effected; that these Inclinations may be subdued, and Nature brought to a Regular State?

What more desirable, than to know how after all, God may be appeased, Forgiveness may be obtained, and that heavy load upon Human Nature, arising from the Guilt of a Man's Mind, may be removed?

Lastly, What more desirable, than to know the Certainty and Condition of a Future State, and how we may attain to the Happiness of it?

These and the like, used to be the Prime Questions which all, and especially the most thoughtful and considerate part of Mankind sought, but in vain, for Satisfaction in. And therefore since Revelation is to make up the Defects of Natural Light, and is as well for the satisfaction of Mankind, as to be worthy of God, we may reasonably expect that these should be the chief Subject of such Revelation.

And a Revelation without this, that should leave Mankind in the same Circumstances of Igno-

Ignorance and Diſſatisfaction as they were in before ſuch Revelation, is no more to be eſteemed, than that Courſe of Phyſick, which after all Pretences to Infallibility, leaves a Perſon as much under the Power of his Diſeaſe, as before he followed thoſe Preſcriptions: It is no Revelation, and can have no Pretence to ſuch a Venerable Title.

But when the Subject is Great, Noble, and Sublime, thus worthy of God, and thus beneficial to Mankind: When there is an exact Concord between the Principles of Nature and Reaſon, and that all falls in with the true and juſt Notion we have of things. When there is an Harmony through the whole, we have good reaſon to ſay, This, if any, is the Revelation.

And as far as theſe Characters belong to Revelation, ſo much reaſon have we to believe the Matter of Scripture to be ſuch; as I ſhall afterwards ſhew, when I come to examine the Revelation of Scripture by theſe Characters.

3. It would be very deſirable toward the Confirmation of a Revelation, and for the Satisfaction of thoſe that are required to believe it, that there be an Evidence and Teſtimony as Extraordinary, as the Matter Revealed is, and the Authority it reſts upon; ſuch as the one is, ſuch in

in reaſon ought the other to be: And that is Divine Atteſtation. A Divine Atteſtation I account that to be, which exceeds the Power, and is out of the Road of Nature; for nothing leſs can change the Courſe, and alter the Law of Nature, but that which is above Nature, and gave Law to it; and it muſt be ſomewhat above Nature, that can be a ſufficient Witneſs to what is Supernatural. And this may juſtly be required to juſtify the Truth of a Revelation, and to diſtinguiſh it from Enthuſiaſm and Impoſture. For when the Caſe is ſuch as *Moſes* puts it, *Exod.* 4. 1, &c. *They will not believe me, nor hearken to my voice; for they will ſay, the Lord hath not appeared unto thee*; there needs ſomewhat beyond a bare Affirmation, to ſupport the Credit of the Revelation, and the Authority of him that pretends to it. And accordingly, he was endued with a Power of working Miracles, *That*, ſaith the Text, *they may believe that the God of their fathers, Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, hath appeared to thee.* A ſort of Evidence (as that implies) that is very neceſſary, and what may reaſonably be demanded; and which is a Proof of the higheſt nature, and what as all ordinarily can judge of, being a matter of Senſe, ſo where it is true, what we are to be concluded by.

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The first thing then required and to be considered, is the Reality of the thing, That there is such an Alteration in the Course and State of Nature, which our own Senses will inform us in. The next thing is, That this Alteration cannot proceed from any Natural or Created Cause; (for that would be to set Nature above it self.) The last thing is, That this Alteration in Nature is brought about for such an end, and is solely for the sake of that Revelation, and to give Testimony to it.

Where this is, there is the Finger of God, and an Infallible Proof of the Truth and Certainty of what it is to witness to.

Now let us lay all this together, and see what it amounts to; *viz.* The Capacity, Ability, and Integrity of the Persons to whom this Revelation is made; the Unanimity and Consent of Persons remote and distant in Time and Place; the Usefulness and Reasonableness, the Excellency, Sublimity, and Perfection of the Doctrine they taught; the Testimony given to them by such Operations and Productions as exceed the Power of Created Causes, and are wholly from the Supreme. Where these are concurring, and with one mouth, as it were, giving in their Evidence, we may say it is the Voice of God, and that

that it is his Revelation which carries upon it the conſpicuous Stamp of his Authority. For God cannot be ſuppoſed to bear witneſs to a Falſhood, and to ſet up that as a Light to direct men in their Enquiry, which is no other than an *Ignis Fatuus*, and tends to their unavoidable Amuſement and Deception.

But ſuppoſing thoſe that were Cotemporaries with Inſpired Perſons, had all theſe concurring Evidences for their ſatisfaction, yet what is this to thoſe that live in Times diſtant and remote from them, and have it only by Tradition of Perſons uninſpired; or as contained in certain Books ſaid to be wrote by Perſons inſpired?

This brings me to the laſt Point, which is,

3. The Caſe of thoſe that live in After-Ages, when Inſpiration is not pretended to, and Miracles have ceaſed, and ſo want thoſe Advantages for their Satisfaction, which they that were coetaneous with Inſpired Perſons, might receive; and yet being obliged alike to believe as the other, muſt be ſuppoſed to have ſufficient Authority and Proof for what they are to believe. And then the Queſtion is, What is that Evidence which will be ſufficient for them to ground their Belief upon?

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I anſwer 1. That if ſuch have all the Evidence that can be in their Circumſtances, they have what is ſufficient, and what is to be preſumed neceſſary. The Evidence is ſufficient, if it proves there were Perſons ſo Inſpired; that in confirmation of it they wrought Miracles; and that thoſe Perſons wrote certain Books which contain the Records of thoſe Revelations and Miracles; and which Books are the ſame that now go under their Name.

And if they have all the Evidence for this that in their Circumſtances can be reaſonably demanded, they have that which is ſufficient. And what Evidence can be given of Matters tranſacted 1600 Years ago, but Teſtimony, and what is uſually called Moral Evidence? A way of Proof that is as certain as that we our ſelves were born, and born of ſuch Parents, at ſuch a time; and that there is any ſuch thing as Faith and Truſt in Mankind.

2. Tho theſe of After-Ages want the Evidence thoſe Cotemporaries of Inſpired Perſons had; yet they have ſome Advantages above them. For they have not only the concurrent Evidence of all before them, and the Reaſons of their Judgment that have been downwards from thoſe times, the moſt conſiderable part of Man-

kind for Wiſdom and impartial Conſideration; but having lived to ſee the whole Scheme of Revelation compleated, and at once plac'd in their view,

1. They can by that means compare one part with the other, and ſee how all agrees, and makes up one entire and coherent Body.

2. They can compare the Events already paſs'd, with the Predictions, and ſee how all came on, and in their ſeaſon are fulfilled, and how the former is ſtill confirmed by the latter. In all which there appears an admirable Contrivance of the Divine Preſcience, in deſcribing thoſe things ſo long before-hand, and of the Divine Wiſdom and Power in carrying on the Prophetick Line through all the Stages of Second Cauſes, and an Infinite Variety of Events, to the laſt Moment of its Accompliſhment; and to all which a watchful Providence of the Almighty muſt conſtantly attend.

3. They have ſeen the Wonderful Succeſs of the Goſpel in Verification of Prophecy; and notwithſtanding all the Oppoſition made to it by the Power and Intereſt of the World, back'd with the Venom, Spite, and Malice of inveterate Enemies.

4. They have ſeen the Wonderful Preſervation of it through all the various Scenes of Proſperity and Adverſity; and how miraculouſly it has been reſtored out of the loweſt Abyſs, when ſeem-

ſeemingly, and as to all outward appearance, beyond Recovery.

So that we ſee how in every Caſe there are ways chalked out for our Satisfaction in this Argument of a Divine Revelation; the Caſe of Latter Ages not excepted.

And therefore, That Unbelief is now as inexcuſable after the Times of Revelation, as in thoſe times. We are apt to think, and ſometimes to plead, That if we had lived in the Apoſtolical Age, when the Revelation was attended with the irrefragable Teſtimony of many Glorious Miracles, we ſhould then have been inexcuſable, if we had remained incredulous amidſt thoſe Inſtances of the Divine Power, or impenitent under the Force of ſuch convincing Arguments; and that the want of theſe may juſtly be pleaded for our Excuſe. But this is much like thoſe *Jews*, *Matth.* 23. 30. that ſaid, *If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets*; when yet they were acted by the ſame Spirit. And I may ſay, Thoſe that believe not now under all the Motives of Credibility, would not have believed, any more than the *Jews* did, that were Eye and Ear-Witneſſes of our Saviour's Miracles and Doctrine, and yet remained to the laſt Incredulous.

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Such are incurable; for if they hear not *Moſes* and the Prophets, the Teſtimonies yet remaining, neither would they be perſuaded, tho Chriſt and the Apoſtles roſe from the dead, and the whole Proceſs of that Teſtimony given by them, was afreſh repreſented to them. The Beſt Man is the beſt Judge; and the better he is, the more capable he is of Judging; according to that memorable Saying of our Saviour, *John* 7. 17. *If any man will do the will of God, he ſhall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of my ſelf.*

Wherefore (to conclude with that of the Apoſtle, *James* 1. 21.) *lay apart all filthineſs and ſuperfluity of naughtineſs, and receive with meekneſs* [and humility] *the ingrafted word, which is able to ſave your ſouls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own ſelves.*

FINIS.

ERRATA.

Sermon I. *Page* 18. *Line* 2. *read* Threefold.
Sermon II. *P.* 11. *l.* 18. *dele.* Miracles. *P.* 15. *l.* 15. *for* II. *r.* 2. *P.* 24. *Marg. add* Præpar. l. 13. c. 12. *P.* 28. *l.* 23. *after* Poet *r.* quoted by Porphyry. *P.* 29. *l.* 24. *r.* Antedeluvian. *P.* 37. *after line* 12. *add* 2. Miracles; of which hereafter.
Sermon III. *P.* 3. *l.* 15. (or pry) *in a Parentheſis.*

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